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No mistake to admit one

It is no mistake for a President to confess to a tendency to err. At his first press conference President Carter did it in such a way as to convince the Congress that he will alter some of his tactics and procedures, especially as they relate to appointments.

When asked about his relations with congressmen, he responded: "We've given them cause for some of the complaints, inadvertently . . . It's hard for me to decide which person to appoint, to have an FBI check, an Internal Revenue Service check, to have the press constantly trying to get the name before anyone else knows it . . ."

The President presented his problem in a creditable fashion; and on a day there was evidence he already had begun to change the format of his appointive chores. His nomination of Adm. Stansfield Turner is a case in point.

Turner's credentials are marked by academic brilliance and military achievement of a rare order, plus an independence of mind that may make him a bit of an oddity in a Democratic administration. Not many admirals have been through Harvard Business School's advanced management course or earned a master's degree in philosophy at Oxford.

These items alone do not necessarily make him the best qualified to be the next CIA chief, but they do say something about President Carter's latest approach to personnel matters. They say he has done some careful homework before sending Turner's name to the Congress. They say he learned a lesson from the rejection of Theodore Sorensen, the first nominee whose name was posted without sufficient checking with everyone concerned.

In the Sorensen case, Mr. Carter did give Congress "cause for some complaints," albeit, as he insists, "inadvertently." The Turner case suggests the President has been less inadvertent, and therefore may give Congress less cause for complaints. If so, the admission of mistakes will be recorded as one of the most important and constructive remarks made at Mr. Carter's first press conference.

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